

BREAKING GROUND



[7] BORN DEAF INTO A
HEARING WORLD



[8] PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING
MAKING 2008-2009 GRADUATES



[18] TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

TENNESSEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

2009

TENNESSEE
COUNCIL



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MEET THE 2009 TENNESSEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM STUDENT DELEGATES!

This was one of the most difficult years ever to select just 20 Student Delegates for our 2009 Youth Leadership Forum, June 29 – July 2, on Vanderbilt University campus. We had a large batch of excellent, talented applicants from across the State, and are looking forward to a wonderful Summer program, doing our best to help develop tomorrow's community leaders.

I could tell you more about these stellar students, but better they speak for themselves. – Ned Andrew Solomon



TYLER BUNN, *Knox County*

"One awesome experience in my life was the time I made a hole-in-one on the 13th hole at Fox Den Country Club. This feat is astoundingly special because I play golf with one arm. I use my left cane to hold me up and keep my balance while swinging with my right arm...I have contributed lots of hard

work, dedication and time in trying to get as good as I can in the sport of golf. Also this shows that I do not let my disability stop me from doing things I want to do."



MARY DUNCAN, *Gibson County*

"I feel qualified to be a delegate to the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum for a couple of reasons. First, I was born with Spina Bifida. Because of this I am paralyzed from the waist down. I have to use a wheelchair to get around. Some people consider that a handicap. I just think I was able to get my own set of wheels before my friends.

"The other reason is ever since I was little I have been doing things with LeBonheur and the March of Dimes about disabilities. I want people to understand that just because I am in a chair doesn't mean I can't do the same things. Some of those things just might be done in a different way."



TABITHA CROWSON, *Montgomery County*

"When I was young I had a really hard time with my disability, because I had a lot of reading problems. I had low confidence when I was little. It was really hard to do my work.

"What I want to do after I graduate high school is go to college and start working in

the medical field."

DAKOTA "CODY" DUNKLE, *Lawrence County*

"I was born with CMV. CMV is called Cytomegalovirus. It caused my hearing loss. A disadvantage is I can't communicate with people who are hearing because I can't hear what they are saying. I have been in public school since I was two or three years old. I can use sign language. My interpreter can translate what teachers say to me, and also what I want to say to them.

"I would like to go to a technical school or college. I would like to become a computer technician."



CHRISTIN DAVIS, *Shelby County*

"I am qualified to be a delegate to this forum because I follow rules and regulations at my school. I have always been eager to learn new things and put the new learning into action. I want to attend so I can learn from the presenters and participants. I will be very excited to bring the knowledge back to my

school and community. Participation in this leadership forum will help me choose what I really want to do with my life."



JULIA HENDERSON, *Shelby County*

"I would be a great candidate because I am willing to learn new skills that are helpful in life. I would put them to good use to help people learn that they can do it too. I like meeting new people and I think the four days at the forum will be fun too.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE →

"One of my all-time favorite teachers was Mrs. Craig from first grade. She always made class fun, and I met my best friend in Knoxville in her class. She always made me feel like I fit in, even if I wasn't as smart as the other kids. She moved away to Texas. She made us all happy when she came to visit us. I would like to be like her and make people happy."



TEONESHIA HILL, Gibson County

"I feel I am qualified to attend this forum because I believe that even a person with a disability can be in leadership. I want to attend so I can meet other people and also learn."

"After graduation I want to attend The Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna, Tennessee, to learn a trade or skill that will help better my life."



DILLON IRELAND, Williamson County

"With my disability, I have had some tough times. I have learned to deal with cerebral palsy, since I will have it for all my life. At first, when I was between two to five years old, I learned to talk, walk and handle stuff better. I have insoles in my shoes...I have had a cast on my left hand because of my brittle bones."

"I am currently a student in the Franklin High School Transition Program. My plans for now include finding a better paying job, exploring junior colleges and possibly working with a group at a digital designing business."

EDDIE JOHNSTON, Shelby County

"I have two people that positively influence my life. First, my teacher, Ms. Whitney Ware...she found a sponsor for me so I could be on the wrestling team. Ms. Ware made sure people don't bother me and makes sure I learn what I need to learn. She helps me to make the right choices by teaching me what to do, and what not to do. She has respect for me, and I have respect for her."

"What I plan on doing after Cordova High School is attend training to learn how to do carpentry and putting in flooring. I will have my own landscaping business, Eddie L. Johnston III Lawn Service."



ALEXANDRA "ALLIE" KING, Shelby County

"I was supposed to be on homebound school this year. I wanted to go back to school. This fall I returned to school with short-term memory deficits, and bilateral fine motor involvement. My walking and balance were still a little shaky carrying books and going from class to class."

"I have a laptop to write notes on, but my hand writing is improving. I lost a year of school credits, but my guidance counselor and teachers have a schedule of classes that will enable me to earn my credits to graduate with my class in 2010! I am determined to graduate and be an active member of my community...I want to represent success to other children with traumatic brain injuries, and I want to represent perseverance and faith in God!"



KATHLEEN LEHIGH, Shelby County

"An experience that is common is how people stare in public, and how people speak to you in public. Both are uncomfortable, but you get used to them. When small children stare and their parents reprimand them, I try to intervene and invite the kids to ask questions."

I turn to the parents and say, 'I'd prefer them to ask questions, than pretend I don't exist.'

"With regards to speaking to people in public, many people seem to think if you walk with a walker, or sit in a wheelchair, you can't understand the regular speed of speech, or you are deaf... I normally respond to them something like, 'I'm not deaf, please quit yelling,' or 'I may be from the South, but I don't speak that slowly!'"



CODY NOYES, Rutherford County

"The two people who have influenced me and shaped me into what I am today are my dad and grandma. My dad has sacrificed so much of his time and energy to make me happy and give me a wonderful childhood. He has taught me many skills, including how to fish, many aspects about football, how to properly grill a tasty steak and many other delectable grilled entrees. He has also taught me to manage my money...most of all, he has taught me how to have fun and that making another person happy is one of the greatest sources of joy."

properly grill a tasty steak and many other delectable grilled entrees. He has also taught me to manage my money...most of all, he has taught me how to have fun and that making another person happy is one of the greatest sources of joy.

"My grandma is a very special lady. If you need anything she will drop what she is doing and immediately tend to your needs before her own. She has tried to show me how wonderful God is also, to stay positive in hard times, and eventually everything is going to be ok."



BRIAN PENNY, Hamilton County

"The individual who has had the biggest influence on my life is my Taekwondo instructor, Mr. Rick Hall. I began Taekwondo in 1996 at the age of five. Because of my disability, my family members and also I myself, were skeptical as to whether I would be able to participate in any sport, let alone martial arts. Mr. Hall, on the other

hand, showed faith in me. He allowed me to participate despite my disability...I enjoyed the class immensely, and continue to enjoy it to this day."



ALEC ROBINSON, *Shelby County*

"My two special education teachers have had a large impact on my life, and how I manage academics. In elementary school, Ms. Levy shared her common interests with me, and made me feel comfortable in her classroom. She didn't make me feel stupid for asking questions and she has always

been willing to help me out. In middle school, Ms. Isaac would come to my desk each day and teach me one-on-one. She would put extra effort out to make sure I was learning. And I did.

"Now that I am in high school, I can feel ok with asking questions, and it is ok to ask a teacher for individual help if I need it."



MEREDITH SCHLANDT, *Anderson County*

"Due to my Tuberous Sclerosis I have had four surgeries and I have been admitted to the hospital for a Status Epilepticus Seizure...Even though I do not remember much about any of my surgeries or seizure, my parents have told me I was very strong and brave. Due to my diagnosis, I have to

have many tests run and I try to be courageous...due to my disability, I have had some modifications made to my school program. I can learn and memorize and I am able to be in all regular education classes with inclusion and maintain A's and B's with minimum modifications. I have to work long and hard, but I am willing to do this in order to keep good grades."



JARROD STAHL, *Davidson County*

Because of my ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder], I rush through tests and my [mind] wanders in class so I make poor grades. I have to work hard to pay attention sometimes. After I graduate from high school I hope to go to college for years and get a college degree...to get into a good

college I'm going to have to stop getting C's and start getting A's and B's.

"My mom and dad have influenced me because they've helped me with my learning problems. Although their corrections can be annoying sometimes, I feel I never would've gotten this far in high school and life without them."



CAITLYN SHACKLEFORD, *Shelby County*

"My father has and continues to inspire me by teaching me his wisdom. He says book sense comes easy with a little preparation and the sense of actually wanting to learn it, but street sense is something you work extra hard to understand...He also inspires me because he never backs down

from a challenge. In his eye, if you're wrong you're wrong...but he doesn't rub your nose in it. He works with you so you have a better understanding of the situation. He also tries to be my mentor, not only to my brother and sisters and me, but to our community and extended family as well."



ALYSSA TWINE, *Montgomery County*

When I walk the graduation line on May 23, 2009, my plans are to go to college. During that time I will work hard, study hard and do my best. When I finish college in four years, I'm going to be the happiest person.

I will do my very best in the career that I have chosen. Being a person with a disability I have a special understanding about the hopes and fears of people with disabilities. So, in the future, I would also like to learn to help people with disabilities.



TINA WILLIAMS, *Shelby County*

"My experience with having to deal with my hearing disability is hard. When I was in elementary school it was difficult for me to understand my teachers. I had all women teachers, and women tend to talk softly and in a low tone. ...I went to my audiologist and

asked her if there was anything I could do...I live with a hearing family, and luckily they understand my disability, and speak loud enough for me to hear them.

"I show leadership skills in everything that I pursue. For three years I was a member of the student council. I believe by going to this leadership conference, my confidence can become stronger and better my leadership skills."



HANNAH WILLIS, *Putnam County*

"I lead people mostly in understanding disabilities. I lead them to understand with empathy and knowledge. I went blind a year ago, and most people who meet me will say I'm a strong fighter. But what they don't realize is I lead them more than when I was sighted.

Because of my disability, I can lead them in a whole new way. I can get them to see what I see, without seeing it – no pun intended!"

AN INTRODUCTION TO SELF-DETERMINATION

BY BONITA SCOTT

Today, I want to give you an introduction to Self-Determination. Self-determination is making decisions, having power over what you buy to eat, wear, and other things you buy, having power over your own life, having control over the things you want in your own life, choosing who you want to live with, and with whom you want to get married to in your lifetime. The words I will be using today are the following words:

- Decision
- Rights
- Feelings
- Authority
- Responsibility
- Freedom
- Support
- System
- Opportunity
- Dignity & Respect
- Goals.

DECISIONS

Decisions are very important in people's lives. It is very important for people with disabilities to have the opportunities to make our own decisions. If people with disabilities are not given the opportunity to make decisions, we won't learn how to make decisions in our lives. In the last few months I have made two major decisions in my own life. The decisions are to get married and move to Jackson. Both of those decisions will change my life forever.

RIGHTS

People with disabilities have the same basic rights as everyone else. Rights are given to everybody no matter if you have a disability or not. Rights are very important to people with disabilities.

FEELINGS

People with disabilities should be able to express our feelings in every way possible. People with disabilities need to be taken seriously about things that are important to them. Most of the time, people don't think people with disabilities know what we want in our lives. People need to stop and listen to us.

AUTHORITY

Authority is having the power over your money and where the money goes. This should include the money for your services and supports also.

RESPONSIBILITY

People with disabilities want to learn how to take responsibility over their own lives. As people with disabilities we have the responsibility

to let people know this. We want the responsibility to make our own decisions in our own lives.

FREEDOM

When we talk about freedom people don't seem to listen to people with disabilities. Freedom means that we have the freedom to vote, live, work, have relationships, and to have a normal life. Freedom is taken for granted when it comes to people with disabilities.

SUPPORT

Supports are services that people need to live in their communities. We need to help find support services for people when they move out of the state run institutions. We need to support all people no matter if they have a disability or not. People with severe disabilities may need more support than other people. People need all kinds of support, people need to have natural support as well as other supports.

SYSTEM

People with disabilities want to change the current system. We want the old system to support self-determination. We also want the old system to change to a new and effective system. We want a system that works for all people, not just people without disabilities.

OPPORTUNITY

People with disabilities need to have more opportunities to do the following things: work, drive, get married, buy a home, vote, to have a happy life, to be happy with someone you love and care about very much.

GOALS

Self-determination is being able to set your own personal goals for yourself. Goals are a very important part of people's daily lives. My personal goals are:

- To get married.
- To own a house with a white picket fence around it and swimming pool in the backyard.
- To own a red mini-van.
- To own my own business — Bonita's Daycare Center.
- To be known as a person who stood up for her rights and for other peoples' rights.
- To be known as a self-advocate to my friends who may need one.

I would like to leave you with three important words to remember:

I will, I can, I did it!

Bonita Scott was president of People First of Tennessee when she gave this speech at the Advocacy Forum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in Spring 1999. Ms. Scott died later that year.

BORN DEAF INTO A HEARING WORLD

BY TABITHA BURNS

There is a question
I often ask people:

"What is it like to hear?" I am hard of hearing, and I am actually glad I am deaf. There is a silver lining in any bad situation, and I have overcome my deafness with confidence. I have a second chance to hear; I wear a hearing aid.

I was about three years old when my mom noticed I didn't respond to her voice. But the doctors told her I was just ignoring her. My mom knew more than the doctors; she, finally, found the doctor who came to the conclusion that I was deaf.

My mom worked with me so I could speak clearly. By the time I was five, I got my first set of hearing aids.

I will never forget the day I went to the hearing clinic as a deaf five-year-old little girl and came out as a hearing person. The first sounds I heard were the birds whistling and the cars speeding by. I was like a kid in a candy store. So many different sounds I discovered from a tiny machine. I was blown away at the noise I could've missed out on. I enjoyed the sounds hearing people take advantage of.

Even though my hearing aids changed my life, I was still holding back. People look down on disabled people, and I was afraid to tell people that I was hard of hearing. I was afraid up until my seventh grade year. That was my first year in a public school. I had left my private school because of money and my teachers had no time to help me.

Before I started school, I told myself, "People will accept me if I have accepted my disability." Just accepting being deaf as a part of life built my confidence, success and optimism. I went through middle school as a deaf girl, but people knew me as "Tabitha" not as "that deaf girl". I participated in everything as my friends did. I made A's in my classes.

Surprisingly, my deafness was my silver lining. Though my deafness was my weakness, I found my strengths to dominate the silence. With my optimistic outlook on life, I knew I wanted to make a difference. There are many people with disabilities — in particular teenagers and young adults — who are making a difference. I am making a difference. My volunteer efforts are not to get people to feel sorry for me, or to make them think I am better than them. I want to show them that I have overcome a burden to help others in need.



Photo by Tabitha Burns

Today, I am at the point in my life where people know me for who I am, not what I am. In my volunteer work for the military, police and people with disabilities, I bring many smiles and change many lives. A quote I live by is, "If I can make people smile, then I have done my favor for God." Red Skelton, a comedian, said that. There's a deeper meaning behind this quote. Red Skelton is trying to tell people that life may be hard and scary, but it is up to you whether or not you have the courage to accept a challenge with a smile.

My hearing aid gave me a second chance to hear and I took advantage of every opportunity given to me. Seeing people complaining or being depressed about anything wrong in their lives makes me want to tell them they are going through this bad situation for a reason. They have to accept the bad situation and find the good in it. I do not know the reason why I am deaf, but I have happily accepted my deafness. My own answer to my question, "What is it like to hear?" is knowing the world exists through your heart.

One has to accept life's challenges, and I have accepted my deafness with a smile, all thanks to God and my hearing aid. I overlooked deafness and started my life journey.

Tabitha Burns is a Youth Leadership Forum graduate. She was a YLF program assistant in 2008 and will be again this year.



Photo by JoEllen Fowler

PARTNERS 08-09 CLASS GRADUATES

On April 18, 23 Tennesseans accepted their diplomas for completing the 2008-09 Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute. This year's class, a mixture of individuals with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities, attended seven sessions on a variety of disability topics, including the State and Federal Legislative processes, building community, the history of the disability experience, best practices in inclusive education, assistive technology, working with new media, and issues around supported living and supported and customized employment.

In their final weekend, the 08-09 Partners traveled to downtown Nashville to tour The Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the State Capitol. They had an inspiring and eye-opening conversation with Senator Jack Johnson from District 23 (Williamson and part of Davidson Counties), and an in-depth look into the world of advocating through the new media, conducted by media consultants Susan Barnes and Bill Dockery. For the record, Mr. Dockery is a 35-year journalism veteran and a graduate of the 07-08 Partners class.

We are thrilled to have three former Youth Leadership Forum Student Delegates in this graduating class: Allison Toth, Josh Gibson and Bryan Hilbert!

Congratulations to the following folks who devoted several weekends to learning, networking and teaching others from their own unique perspectives on disability. They will be joining the growing number of Partners graduates – now 363 – throughout the great State of Tennessee!



Ned Solomon, Mark Montgomery, Hermitage, Wanda Willis

Photo by Bill Dockery

Photos by Bill Dockery
From Left to Right

Stevie Bailey, Nashville
Deborah Balthrop, La Vergne
Meghan Burke, Nashville



Tina Cicirello, Nashville
Dennis Clark, Oliver Springs
Jacqueline Dowlen, Nashville



Josh Gibson, Nashville
Sheryle Guinn, Lafayette
Shirlene Harbert, Antioch



Bryan Hilbert, Knoxville
Cheri Howlett, Powell
Thomas Jerdon, Collierville



Allison Toth, Nashville
Cynthia Martin, Tullahoma
Michele Priddy, Hendersonville



Debbie Riffle, Humboldt
Connie Robinson, Germantown
Anthony Sledge, Memphis



Marilyn Sortor, Memphis
Tammie Taylor, Memphis
Jo VerMulm, Murfreesboro
Nicole Wilkins, Memphis (not pictured)



"I fully realize how much of an impact that I can have in my local community as well as advocating on the state and national level. I would like to be an inspiration and resource for others in my community and encourage others to get involved!"

"I have a much wider knowledge on how to have effective relationships with your opponents. Working together effectively is very important to get the goal accomplished. Thank you Partners!"

ONE FAMILY'S EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE AND HOPE

GUEST COMMENTARY BY RUD TURNBULL

Now that
the nation's

economy is in a recession and government funding of disability programs is problematic, and in light of the comments during the recent presidential campaigns about community organizing and disability policy, it seems appropriate to offer an historical perspective about families, their members with a disability, private action, and public policy.

First, the future of any child with a disability born in this decade is promising largely because of the private action — the community organizing — that parents of children with disabilities began more than 50 years ago.

Second, it is inconceivable that parents and people with disabilities will ever find respite from creating new or better services and advocating for progressive public policy. To discount that fact is to disrespect, in the most profound of ways, the efforts of advocates past, present and future.

I know that to be so because our son, Jay, has intellectual disability, autism and bi-polar disorder, and because my wife, Ann, and I have been community organizers for all of his 41 years.

Had we not joined with others to create special education services, alternatives to institutions, places of gainful employment and opportunities for recreation and leisure, he would have faced either permanent institutional placement or a life in our home, isolated and idle. He would have been no different than other children with disabilities.

Like other parents, we had no choice but to organize our communities, to advocate and build capacity at the local and state levels, and to take our case to Congress as advocates for parent-directed organizations and to contribute to *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) briefs in two cases that the Supreme Court decided.

Like Ann and me, other parents were more than stimulants to community altruism.

Parents successfully sued state education agencies to secure their children's admission to school. They then persuaded Congress to enact the first federal special education law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). They were the vanguard opposing President Reagan's efforts to de-regulate special education.

They led the movement to reform, close down and prevent placements in horrific institutions. They pushed Congress to authorize the attorney general to intervene in lawsuits against states that violated the civil rights of institutionalized individuals with disabilities.

Parents were the moving force behind an amendment to the Medicaid statute authorizing federal assistance to improve state institutions. In time, they persuaded Congress to shift the funds from institutional care to home- and community-based services.

They successfully advocated for federal law authorizing states to support individuals with severe disabilities to work in regular worksites for regular wages.

They declared their opposition to the withholding or withdrawing of life-saving treatment from newborns with disabilities, and they were directly responsible for the federal law that presumes in favor of treating these babies.

Parents opposed physical, chemical and electronic restraints that too often had been used for administrative convenience and without evidence of their treatment efficacy. They marshaled their resources to create federal support for research that offers a different, more positive approach to shaping behavior.

Parents helped persuade the Supreme Court to hold that capital punishment of people with intellectual disability violates the Constitution. They advocated for diversion from the criminal justice system so that their sons and daughters could be treated humanely.

They succeeded in securing special-needs adoption and foster care law and practice. They secured federal law authorizing family support.

Parents were powerful advocates for the Americans with Disabilities Act and [led] efforts to reform that law to overturn adverse decisions of the Supreme Court.

When any parent of a child with a disability looks toward the future, that same parent should heed three lessons from history.

First, private action — call it community organizing if you will — has been directly responsible for the policies, practices, and the positive public attitudes that make it possible for today's parents to look confidently to the future.

Second, bi-partisanship has been the hallmark of progressive disability policy. No political party has any special claim to the past or the future.

Third, whenever and wherever people not personally affected by disability have organized their communities, especially for underserved residents, they have benefited families and individuals who are affected by disability. That is so because there is a powerful correlation between disability on the one hand and poverty, single-parent status, and ethnicity on the other.

We have been creating services and policy for 41 years; that's how old our son is. In the normal course of events, we will predecease him. I understand all about hope for the future, fear of the future and about the valor and grit it takes to create a life for him and for our two daughters.

When we acted for our son, we acted on behalf of others with disabilities and their families. When we advocated for them, we sought results for him and ourselves. Private action for progressive policy has been a mutual responsibility.

In this time of profound change in economics and public leadership, we express gratitude to the advocates who came before us, recommit ourselves to our reliable allies, and undertake, once again, the obligation of advocacy, hoping that, someday soon, we and other parents will have far less of it to do.

Rud Turnbull is a Distinguished Professor in special education and life span studies, and co-founder and co-director of the Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas. Contact him at: Rud@ku.edu.

This entry was posted at PatriciaEBauer, News & Commentary on Disability Issues (www.patriciaebauer.com) on Saturday, December 20th, 2008 and is used with permission of the author.

RESOURCES ON SELF-DETERMINATION

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

The Self-Determination Project at the University

of Tennessee Center on Disability and Employment (CDE) defines self-determination as "a process of learning about oneself, one's interests, talents, skills, preferences, and dislikes." CDE's Web site lists five primary principles of self-determination: Freedom – to choose and plan your life; Authority – to control your environment; Support – for building a life in your community; Responsibility – to choose, control and direct your actions; and Confirmation – to realize your dreams.

The following national resources are intended to assist individuals, families, and service providers as they seek information on issues related to self-determination. The list is selective.

The **CENTER FOR SELF-DETERMINATION** is a clearinghouse, training and technical assistance source on self-determination in the United States and other countries. The Center is devoted to moving power and authority over resources directly to individuals with disabilities, families and allies. www.centerforself-determination.com/

DISABILITY RESOURCES is a nonprofit organization established to promote and improve awareness, availability and accessibility of information that can help people with disabilities live, learn, love, work and play independently. There is a helpful section of resources on self-determination.

www.disabilityresources.org/SELF-DETERMINATION.html

The **NATIONAL COALITION ON SELF-DETERMINATION** is a partnership of people with disabilities, parents and family members who work to promote federal policies that support the five principles of self-determination. The organization works with other national disability organizations and federal officials to promote self-determination and community living for all individuals with disabilities. www.nconsd.org/

SELF ADVOCATES BECOMING EMPOWERED (S.A.B.E.) works to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equals and that they are given the same decisions, choices, rights, responsibilities and chances to speak up to empower themselves, to have opportunities to make new friends, and to learn from their mistakes. It is a national self-advocacy organization with members and representatives from every state in the United States. www.sabeusa.org/

The **SELF-DETERMINATION PROJECT** works directly with individuals and their support networks to assist with the development of approaches that promote empowerment, advocacy and self-direction. The overall goal of the Project is to provide opportunities for students in high schools, middle schools and elementary schools to learn about themselves, to take a strong role in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, and to learn about post-school resources that will lead to employment. www.utmem.edu/bcdd/training/community/sd.htm

TASH is an international association of people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates and professionals advocating for a society in which inclusion of all people in all aspects of society is the norm. TASH is an organization of members concerned with human dignity, civil rights, education and independence for all individuals with disabilities. www.tash.org/index.html

QUALITYMALL.ORG has a resource section that contains books, electronic media, on-line forums and other products that show ways in which people with developmental disabilities are taking and can take greater control over their services and their lives.

www.qualitymall.org/directory/dept1.asp?deptid=2

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center



GOVERNOR REAPPOINTS COUNCIL MEMBER

In January, Governor Phil Bredesen reappointed **Barron Garrett** to the Council on Developmental Disabilities. In making the announcement, the Governor said, "The state of Tennessee is very fortunate to have citizens...who are willing to serve the state through its boards and commissions....and I appreciate their commitment and willingness to serve."

Mr. Garrett lives and works in McMinnville and represents the Upper Cumberland Development District.

PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING 15TH ANNUAL REUNION CONFERENCE

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

The Partners in Policymaking
15th Annual Reunion

Conference took place March 13 and 14 at the Brentwood Holiday Inn. Sponsored by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and hosted by the current 08-09 Partners class, the event drew over 120 participants from across Tennessee.

The event kicked off with a keynote address on the merits of networking by long-time Washington, D.C., disability rights leader and activist, Ollie Cantos. Breakout sessions were diverse, from Corinne Derenberger's workshop on creating a non-profit, to Dena Gassner's talk on Exiting the Shame Train, to the complete creation of two Partners in Policymaking songs in a musical session on team building, led by Nashville songwriter Billy Kirsch. Friday concluded with a dinner and dance – a Reunion tradition!

On Saturday, William Edington, public policy director with the Council on Developmental Disabilities, updated the current Partners and Partners grads on the latest state and federal legislative activity. Then Partners graduate Alan Muir spoke about his COSD (College Opportunities for Students with Disabilities) employment initiative housed at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, followed by Megan Griffin, who discussed the first year of planning for The Vanderbilt University Postsecondary Education program for students with intellectual disabilities – a grant from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Partners were gleefully sent on their way with a hilarious closing keynote by stand-up comedian, Michael Aronin.



Photos by Christy Wells-Reece and Chamisa Melton



MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR NEXT YEAR'S 16TH ANNUAL PARTNERS
REUNION AT THE SHERATON MUSIC CITY, TO BE HELD ON

FEBRUARY 19 & 20, 2010!

A TIME TO LEARN AND TO SHARE:

TENNESSEE ADULT BROTHERS AND SISTERS CONFERENCE

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

On April
3-4, 2009,

adult brothers and sisters who have siblings with disabilities gathered, some together with their sibling, at the Holiday Inn Select at Vanderbilt in Nashville for the First Annual Tennessee Adult Brothers and Sisters (TABS) conference. Joined by students and professionals interested in sibling issues, conference participants discussed, reflected and learned about the myriad issues pertinent to the experiences of siblings, and became more familiar with supports available in Tennessee.

"I really enjoyed that the [TABS Conference] speakers were siblings who had stories to share about their brother or sister. It helped to know that other people are experiencing the same things that we are."

The conference aim was to supply siblings with information and to encourage networking, however, personal stories were the most touching component of the gathering. The following stories have been shared by two siblings and a sibling-in-law, who attended the conference.

TALKING ABOUT IT

It wasn't until I started working at the Boling Center in 2003, and at the urging of a peer who was also a sibling of a person with a disability, that I ever talked about my sister publicly. It wasn't because I didn't love her. It was because it was not widely accepted to talk about people with disabilities. My sister was born at a time when people were told by their doctors that their children should be institutionalized. Thank goodness my parents did not listen to that advice, but, as we know, many did because that was the thinking of that time.

The whole idea of being open about having a sibling with a disability is a very recent occurrence. As sibs, we can get bogged down in issues of money, providers, and policies, so having a place where we can be around people who are going through the same things we are going through is very important.

The formation of TABS and the conference this year is such a positive step for us. This group will get people talking about their siblings. It is a real help for people to see that it is okay to have a brother or a sister with a disability, and it is okay to talk about it. When I think about all of the things my sister has taught me about patience, love, more patience, more patience, and more patience, how can I not talk about that?

At the conference, I was talking with two people at my table, and they



Photo by Chun-yu Chiu

shared their story with me, and it turns out that they are facing some pretty tough times. They needed the conference to know that is okay to ask questions, and to know what questions they need to ask that they haven't yet thought of. For their family, open communication is needed, and I think the TABS Conference promoted the idea of family communication and openness. They heard that being said.

– Ruth Roberts

MAKING CONNECTIONS

I remember the day we found out my brother was deaf – I was eight years old, second oldest in a family of seven kids. Through their tears, my parents sat us down and explained how Michael was just like us, only he couldn't hear. We would all vow to help him as much as we could.

We often went with Mom and Michael to speech therapy classes and then to the Tennessee School for the Deaf (TSD). At an early age, I decided that my future calling was to teach children who are deaf (a very typical sibling decision)! It was in college that I first met someone (other than my own siblings) who had a sibling who was deaf. What a wonderful experience that was!

As I began my career at TSD, I became involved in Sibshops and discovered that this was also my calling – to help other young sibs make those connections that I didn't get to make until college.

The TABS Conference provided another opportunity to see those sibling connections being made. More than 60 people had the chance to share the good and not-so-good parts of being a sibling of a person with special needs. The sibling relationship is typically the longest-lasting one in a family and is often one of the closest.

My life has been richly blessed by having a special sib and also by having met so many wonderful brothers and sisters. I want to share that experience with others. I'm looking forward to the next TABS Conference!

– Tina Prochaska

GAINING BLESSINGS

Growing up an only child, it was not uncommon for others to tell me how "lucky" I was not to have to "deal" with brothers or sisters: no

fighting over stuff, no constant nagging and teasing, no teenage drama (other than my own, of course). There may have even been a time when I believed them and shared that sentiment. It certainly seemed as if my life was easier being the sole recipient of my parents' love and affection.

As I have gotten older and (debatably) matured, I have grown to realize how wrong those people were. Being a sibling is one of the greatest blessings that God allows. I have seen first-hand how wonderful having a sibling can be.

When I somehow convinced the love of my life, Ashley, to marry me, I was also fortunate enough to receive a brother, Will, who has cerebral palsy. I had always wondered what impact a sibling could have on one's life, and through Ashley and Will's relationship I now know.

A sibling is the buddy you laugh with, the shoulder you cry on, the friend there to offer a hand, and the unconditional love that is forever by your side. I've seen, through good times and bad, how much Ashley and Will mean to each other, and what a blessing each is in the other's life. And now I'm fortunate to have Will as my brother too.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the First Annual TABS Conference with Ashley, where I heard many others share their heart-warming experiences about their siblings with disabilities. The conference reinforced what I had learned through my interactions with

Ashley and Will: the bond created between siblings cannot be broken by any hardship, frustration, or diagnosis, but rather is strengthened by their shared resolve and unwavering love.

– Brad Coulter

"Meeting other siblings who have brothers or sisters with disabilities was important to me. It was a beautifully humbling experience to see the incredible devotion to loved ones that permeated that room."

The TABS Conference was sponsored by Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities, Harwood Center, TigersEye Advisory, LLC, Siblings United and East Tennessee State University.

For more information on TABS, visit: <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/site/services/disabilityservices/siblingprograms.aspx>

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

VOLUNTEER ADVOCACY PROJECT

BY MEGHAN BURKE

On April 21, 2009, 16 individuals from Nashville and Memphis completed an intensive 12-week course. The graduates of The Volunteer Advocacy Project attended nearly 40 hours of in-class time and shadowed an advocate at an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting. Each of the advocates will now be linked with four families of children with disabilities as volunteer advocates. Over 50 families of children with disabilities will be served by this cohort. This adds to the inaugural Fall cohort [see *Breaking Ground*, February 2009], whose 12 advocates are also in the process of working with four families each, bringing the total number of families to be served by the project to 112.

Recognizing the need for special education advocacy services across Tennessee, the training was based in Nashville with a video-conference feed to Memphis. Using new technology, participants in both the Middle and Western regions of the State were able to access the training to enable them to advocate for families of children with disabilities. Across both sites, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, the University of Tennessee Boling Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Support and Training for Exceptional Parents (STEP), The Arc of the Mid-South and The Arc of Davidson County collaborated to ensure a successful training for the participants.

With the success of this technology, interagency collaboration and dedicated participants, the project may expand to other areas of the



Photo by Chun-yu Chiu

Back row (from left to right): Jennifer Maynard, Margaret Davis, Rebecca George, Teri Edmonson, Erin Kice. Front row (from left to right): Lori Mabry, Michele Parker-Priddy, Jennifer Langton, Lisa Keown, Janie Cameron, Ann Curl, Meghan Burke

State for the Fall 2009 session. Furthermore, to allow more individuals to participate in the training, there will be five bi-weekly sessions every other week. Each session will begin on Friday from 1-5 pm and continue on Saturday from 9 am – 3 pm. If you are interested in learning more about The Volunteer Advocacy Project or in participating in the Fall training, please contact **Meghan Burke at (615) 585-1420 or at Meghan.m.burke@vanderbilt.edu**.

Meghan Burke is a doctoral candidate in special education at Vanderbilt University and a graduate of Partners in Policymaking (2009).

The concept of self-determination, or an individual's right to choose, guides Pathfinder's service delivery. Individuals with disabilities, their families and agencies that serve them contact Pathfinder seeking a wide and diverse variety of resources. The list below includes organizations in the Pathfinder database that relate to self-determination.

People First of Tennessee trains Tennesseans with disabilities to address disability-related issues and concerns. It also provides support and opportunities to become active, productive and contributing citizens in the community.

Phone(s): (615) 898-0075 or (800) 264-7773

Web: www.geocities.com/Nashville/Opry/3843/

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) promotes the philosophy of independent living (IL) and supports consumer-controlled IL services by and for all citizens with disabilities in Tennessee.

Phone: (615) 255-0283

Web: www.tnsilc.org

Several regional **Centers for Independent Living (CILs)** across Tennessee pursue complete inclusion and independence for people with disabilities in the community.

Memphis Center for Independent Living

Phone: (901) 726-6404

Web: www.mcil.org

Paris Center for Independent Living

Phone(s): (731) 644-0026 or (866) 895-8277

Email: tarpcil@charterinternet.com

Nashville Center for Independent Living

Phone(s): (615) 292-5803 or (866) 992-4568

Web: www.cil-mt.org

Jackson Center for Independent Living

Phone(s): (731) 668-2211 (800) 278-0737

Web: www.j-cil.com

Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corporation, Inc (TRAC)

Phone: (423) 892-4774

Web: www.4trac.org/

Disability Resource Center (DRC)

Phone (865) 637-3666

Web: drc@drctn.org

Tennessee Microboard Association is committed to the development of high quality comprehensive services and supports to individuals with disabilities in a manner that fosters self-determination and inclusion.

Phone: (615) 594-5899

Web: www.tnmicroboards.org/

The **Self-Determination Waiver Program** provides individuals with intellectual disabilities who have moderate service needs with a cost-effective array of home and community services that complement other supports available to them in their homes and community.

Phone(s): (615) 532-6530 or (800) 535-9725

Web: www.state.tn.us/dmrs

Visit www.familypathfinder.org, to find the most up-to-date resources serving your community; or, call (800)-640-INFO (4636) and our staff will gladly assist you.

Pathfinder and the Tennessee Division of Mental Retardation Services are currently collecting and organizing volunteer resources across the State into a comprehensive, user-friendly database. If you know of a volunteer-run support group or activity in your area, we'd appreciate hearing from you.

Angela Bechtel, MSSW, is Pathfinder's new Information & Referral Services Coordinator. While earning her Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW) degree from the University of Tennessee College of Social Work in 2007, Ms. Bechtel interned at the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and graduated from the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute. She is the mother of three daughters, ages 15, 13, and 10, and a son, 9, who has autism. Ms. Bechtel's current role includes networking with relevant community resources, developing Pathfinder training presentations, and providing efficient, appropriate needs assessment, resource linkage and follow-up services for Pathfinder clients. She is most often "the voice you hear behind the phone!"

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

English & Español

(615) 322-8529

(800) 640-4636

TTY/TDD users:
please dial 711 for
free relay service

www.familypathfinder.org

tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**.

IN MEMORIAM

MICHAEL ANTHONY SEAY



Michael Seay was appointed to the Council on Developmental Disabilities in 1994 and served until 1996 as an At-Large member and chair of the Legislative Committee. Appointed to chair the Council's Proposal Review Committee, Mr. Seay continued to work with the Council for several more years.

When Mr. Seay joined the Council, he said, "I promise to give a quality, untiring effort

towards helping to better and brighten the lives of our developmentally disabled citizenry." And he did.

Sadly, Mr. Seay passed away on March 6, 2009, at the age of 52.

Lana Kile, who was chair of the Council during Mr. Seay's tenure, says, "I served with Michael on the Developmental Disability Council for many years. I found him to be extremely helpful in his knowledge and insight into matters concerning the disability community."

"I felt very close to him and had a lot of respect for him. Not to mention a lot of good times going places with him & Kevin [Wright]. One of my fondest memories was that of going to Shoney's on Music Row late one night with Kevin & his wife Stacy. A rather drunk woman comes up to the table and asks; 'Stevie?' Michael doesn't miss a beat and points to me sitting next to him & says 'No, he is Stevie.' Michael was a dead ringer for Stevie Wonder, between his mannerisms and a hair piece that he wore...Michael's keen sense of humor was outmatched by the dignified way he carried himself. He was very outgoing and articulate. I will remember him as an advocate for all people. The world has lost a lot with Michael's passing."

— *Steve Bowland, former Council member.*

"Michael was a strong supporter of The Arc of the Mid South and the disability population throughout the state. He served on many boards, including The Arc and on several committees advocating for change, removing barriers and promoting community acceptance to individuals with disabilities. Michael will be missed!"

— *Carlene I. Leaper, executive director, Arc of the Mid South.*

"Mr. Michael Seay used his attributes, spiritual belief, exceptional education skills and tireless determination, to make a positive difference in the life of all people with disabilities.

"It is difficult to find words to adequately describe Mr. Seay or his contributions. He was dedicated to the belief that he could make a difference and his ability to comprehend and effectively articulate issues affecting people with disabilities was inspiring.

"Mr. Seay was a recognized advocate for people who are blind and visually impaired. Being given the opportunity to have a positive impact for people in other disability groups was priceless to him.

"I will never forget his signature laughter and how proud he was to serve people with disabilities throughout Tennessee."

— *Samuel E. Cole, program manager,
Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services.*

"Michael was a truly dedicated advocate for individuals and their families who used his wit and humor to convey his often serious message of advocacy."

— *Kevin R. Wright, executive director,
Tennessee Technology Access Program*

"Michael Seay was first appointed to the Council on Developmental Disabilities in 1994. The first thing you noticed about Michael as a Council member was his capacity for leadership, and so he was tapped early on to chair Council committees. The quality that made him a superb chair for any committee was his listening skills. He always kept a discussion right on track and knew which committee members had spoken up and those who had not. He encouraged spirited discussions and always made sure every single person felt comfortable in expressing their views — even those who usually preferred listening quietly to more outspoken colleagues.

"As a member of the Council executive committee for several years, Michael was an invaluable support to me as executive director during critical growth periods for the Council. He understood the mission of the Council and was brave and articulate when talking to policymakers about our vision for the Council.

"Michael was always full of positive energy and laughter. He appreciated the gifts of others. He loved jazz. We liked comparing stories about our daughters, who are the same age.

"Michael will always be an influence on my work. He was a good friend."

— *Wanda Willis, executive director*

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT



Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) Graduate Amanda Cash traveled to Nashville on **Disabilities Day on the Hill** to speak with legislators about her personal concerns. She wants to go to cosmetology school and, ultimately, find employment in a beauty shop. Unfortunately, under current law, the fact that she has a Certificate of Achievement

instead of a High School diploma will interfere with her ability to attend cosmetology school and be licensed in Tennessee. Representative John DeBerry wrote back to Ms. Cash and has introduced a bill to establish an Occupational Diploma for students in special education who attend vocational schools.

Ms. Cash's mom, **Donna Cash**, attributes her daughter's gumption to her YLF training, which helped her to understand that she has the right to pursue her dreams as much as anyone else does.

The **Tennessee Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program & Project BRAIN** are happy to announce that they have received award notification of the **TBI Implementation Partnership Grant** from the **Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** and the **Federal TBI Program**. The TBI Program is partnering with the **Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education**, which is providing the funding match requirement to implement the grant award. The grant is being administered through a contract with the **Tennessee Disability Coalition**.

The goal of HRSA and the federal TBI Program is to allow states and territories to focus on their resources and needs in providing individuals with TBI and their families with a comprehensive, multidisciplinary and easily accessible system of care. The purpose of Project BRAIN's Implementation Partnership grant is to build upon the capacities developed in the original and post-demonstration grants, to incorporate best practices in the field; and to establish sustained systems that will effect lasting change in brain injury services.



The Arc of Tennessee's Board of Directors is proud to announce the appointment of **Ms. Carrie Hobbs Guiden** as executive director. Ms. Hobbs Guiden obtained her graduate degree from Indiana University/Purdue University, Indianapolis, Indiana. She has an extensive professional career supporting people living with developmental disabilities. As the former executive director of **The Arc of Arizona**, Ms. Hobbs Guiden brings knowledge and understanding of the non-profit sector. Her start date will be June 15, 2009.

Self-advocate and folk artist **Lois Curtis** was honored at a reception at the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center** on Thursday, April 2. Ms. Curtis spoke about her art, her current living arrangements and her involvement as a plaintiff in the **Olmstead Decision**.



Ms. Curtis had spent much of her life as a resident in state-operated institutions. Following denial of her repeated requests to live in the community, she, along with **Elaine Wilson** (now deceased), initiated a lawsuit against the **State of Georgia** and, in 1999, their case

came before the **United States Supreme Court**. The Olmstead Decision established a national mandate to free tens of thousands of people with disabilities from institutionalization.

Ms. Curtis has enjoyed great success as a folk artist. Her art has been exhibited in many galleries in Georgia, where she lives, and across the United States.

The reception was hosted by the **Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network**, which includes the **Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, University of Tennessee Boling Center on Developmental Disabilities** and **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities**.



Tammy Day, MEd, has joined the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Postsecondary Education Program (PSE)** and will serve as its program director. Ms. Day previously was a special education liaison and compliance specialist and a coordinator of transition programming and training in **Rutherford County Schools**. She has been a member of the **Tennessee Task Force for Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities** since May 2007. During her career, she has had extensive experience working with students with diverse needs and their families. She is a graduate of **Peabody College of Education** and says she was drawn back to the Vanderbilt University campus and to the PSE "because the mission of the program is at the heart of my life's work."

PSE is well into its initial planning year and will accept its first students in January, 2010. Its implementation is being led by Ms. Day, **Elise McMillan, JD**, UCEDD co-director, and **Robert Hodapp, PhD**, professor of special education and UCEDD research director.

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities awarded a three-year grant to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to plan and coordinate a model Postsecondary Educational Program that is integrated, successful, sustainable and replicable by other Tennessee colleges and universities.

Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities's Creating Homes Initiative is a top 50 finalist in Harvard Kennedy School's **Ash Institute Innovations in Government Award**. Representing the work of city, county, state, federal and tribal government agencies, the Top 50 were selected from

over 600 applicants. Six Innovations in American Government Award winners will be announced in September.

Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS) was awarded the **2009 Carnival Memphis Award of Excellence** at the Carnival Memphis Business and Industry Salute Recognition Luncheon on May 5. The award recognizes SRVS for outstanding achievement and service to the non-profit industry and Mid-South community. SRVS offers comprehensive care to more than 850 individuals with disabilities.



Photos by Diana Fedinec

(Left to right) John Robert Pitts, president of Carnival Memphis, Keith Barton, King of Carnival Memphis, Jeffrie Bruton, executive director of SRVS and Bill Albans, SRVS Board Chairperson

TENNESSEE JUSTICE CENTER MOTHERS OF THE YEAR 2009

Working with families in times of crisis, the **Tennessee Justice Center (TJC)** has witnessed the extraordinary love of mothers. The TJC has stood with parents who persistently advocate for not only their own children, but all children in need of health care. Each year, TJC honors several clients who stand out as exceptional mothers. The TJC is delighted to congratulate the following **2009 Tennessee Justice Center Mothers of the Year**.

BRITTANY WILSON, Kingston Springs

Ms. Wilson is the mother of 18-month-old identical twins, **Addleigh** and **Kennedi**. She runs a church day care. Addleigh and Kennedi need extra care because they both have medical conditions that cause seizures, muscle weakness and developmental delays. With TJC's help, Ms. Wilson was able to save the twins from being disenrolled from **TennCare** just as they were celebrating their first birthday.

JUDY PATTON, Mt. Pleasant

Ms. Patton's adopted son **Ladontay**, age 6, loves skateboarding, coloring, watching wrestling on TV, reading and going to school. When **TennCare** refused to pay for the special flexible frames Ladontay needed to be able to wear his glasses without hurting the painful cysts on his nose, Ms. Patton contacted TJC. Working together, they were able to get the glasses Ladontay needed to reach his potential on the field and in the classroom.

VICIE MOTZ, Greeneville

Ms. Motz is the mother of three adopted children with disabilities. Her oldest, **Trevor**, has challenges walking and talking, and received full-

time nursing care for years, until last Summer, when **TennCare** reduced Trevor's nursing care by half. With TJC's help, Ms. Motz was able to keep her son's care, as well as get clarification about a **TennCare** rule allowing the parents of children with disabilities across the State to run essential errands, like grocery shopping, while their children are with a nurse.

VELMA BROWN, Alpine

Ms. Brown's granddaughter and foster daughter, **Rebecca Ann Dunham**, a high school junior who loves animals, requires physical therapy for severe back pain and medication for her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). When she turned 18, Ms. Dunham aged out of state custody and **TennCare** wrongfully dropped her coverage. With TJC's help, Ms. Brown was able to get Ms. Dunham's **TennCare** reinstated and her bills covered.

IRENE DIXON, Memphis

Ms. Dixon's three-year-old grandson, **Terrell**, has heart and lung difficulties that prevent him from running around, but he still enjoys the outdoors. As Terrell grew, his grandmother became unable to lift and carry him and the ventilator he needs to breathe. Terrell's doctor ordered him a special wheelchair, which still hadn't arrived seven months later. Ms. Dixon called TJC, and together they were able to get the wheelchair Terrell needed to be well cared for and mobile.

SARAH RODRIGUEZ, Gibson

Ms. Rodriguez cares for her adult daughter, who experienced a traumatic brain injury in a car accident, and three grandchildren. Her daughter requires round-the-clock care. When the family received notice that her daughter's nursing care would be cut, which would have forced her into a nursing home, Ms. Rodriguez called TJC. TJC worked to find *pro bono* attorneys to bring a lawsuit that has, for now, stopped her care from being cut.

COMMUNITY MOTHERS OF THE YEAR 2009

TJC also presented its first annual **Community Mothers of the Year** awards. These women are nominated by their children as health care heroes.

LAURENDA WHISENHUNT, Lafayette

Ms. Whisenhunt and her husband **Danny** adopted **Karla** in 2005. Karla had a heart condition and needed to have heart surgery. In her nomination letter, Karla wrote, "When it was time for me to have my surgery, my new Mom stayed with me at Vanderbilt for 7 days. Some things about the hospital were scary. She played games with me and even pulled me up and down the halls in a red wagon." She continued, "I can't really think of the words to tell you how special she is...All of my friends think she is the bomb."

EARNESTINE WILLIAMS, Memphis

Destiney's Mom, Earnestine, is her health care hero. Ms. Williams is devoted to doing everything she can to make sure her daughter is as healthy and happy as possible. "My Mom said when your body is healthy, your mind will be happy and it will help you to focus and do your work," said seven-year-old Destiney.

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